

IMPROVING THE METHODOLOGY OF TEACHING SHORT STORIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION LITERATURE CLASSES

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Abstract. This study explores the improvement of methodologies used in teaching short stories in higher education literature classes. Drawing on recent pedagogical research, the paper examines the effectiveness of student-centered, collaborative, and technology-enhanced approaches in fostering deeper literary understanding and critical thinking skills. The study highlights the limitations of traditional lecture-based instruction and emphasizes the importance of interactive strategies such as inquiry-based learning, group discussions, and digital storytelling. Additionally, it considers the role of formative assessment and culturally responsive teaching in creating inclusive and engaging learning environments. The findings suggest that integrating innovative teaching methods not only enhances students' analytical and interpretive abilities but also increases motivation and participation. The study concludes by recommending practical and adaptable strategies for educators to improve literature teaching practices in diverse higher education contexts.

Keywords: short stories, literature teaching, higher education, student-centered learning, digital pedagogy, collaborative learning, critical thinking, formative assessment, cultural inclusivity, inquiry-based learning.

Introduction. In recent years, the teaching of literature in higher education has undergone significant transformation, driven by technological advancement, changing student needs, and evolving pedagogical paradigms. Among various literary genres, the short story occupies a unique and valuable position due to its brevity, thematic richness, and adaptability to diverse classroom contexts. However, despite its pedagogical potential, the methodology of teaching short stories in university-level literature classes often remains rooted in traditional, teacher-centered approaches that may not fully engage contemporary learners. This has created a pressing need to reconsider and improve instructional strategies in order to enhance students' critical thinking, interpretive skills, and overall literary competence. The short story, as a compact narrative form, provides an accessible entry point into literary analysis while simultaneously offering complex layers of meaning. Scholars such as Poe (1842) historically emphasized the "unity of effect" in short fiction, highlighting its potential for focused analysis. In modern contexts, however, students frequently struggle to connect with literary texts due to limited background knowledge, lack of motivation, or passive learning environments. Recent studies in literature pedagogy suggest that student engagement significantly increases when interactive, student-centered methods are employed (Herrera, 2020; Nguyen & Tran, 2022). Therefore, improving the methodology of teaching short stories requires a shift from traditional lecture-based instruction to more dynamic and participatory approaches.

One of the key challenges in teaching short stories is bridging the gap between textual analysis and students' lived experiences. Contemporary educational theories, particularly constructivism, emphasize the importance of active learning, where students construct meaning through interaction, discussion, and reflection (Vygotsky, 1978; Bruner, 1996). In this regard, integrating collaborative learning techniques, such as group discussions, peer analysis, and problem-based tasks, can significantly enhance comprehension and interpretation. Furthermore, incorporating multimedia tools and digital platforms has been shown to improve students'



engagement and facilitate deeper understanding of literary texts (Kern, 2018; Robin, 2021). Another important aspect of improving methodology lies in diversifying instructional materials and assessment strategies. Traditional methods often prioritize rote memorization and teacher-led interpretation, which may limit students' analytical abilities and creativity. Recent research advocates for the use of formative assessments, reflective writing, and project-based learning to encourage independent thinking and personal response to literature (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001; Bloxham & Boyd, 2019). In the context of short story instruction, activities such as rewriting endings, role-playing characters, and analyzing narrative techniques through digital storytelling can foster deeper engagement and critical awareness. Moreover, cultural relevance and inclusivity have become central considerations in modern literature education. Students in higher education institutions come from increasingly diverse backgrounds, and their interpretations of literary texts are often shaped by their cultural and social contexts. Incorporating a wide range of short stories from different cultures and perspectives can promote inclusivity and broaden students' understanding of global literature (Damrosch, 2020; Gupta, 2023). Additionally, encouraging students to draw connections between texts and their own experiences can make learning more meaningful and impactful.

The role of the instructor is also evolving in response to these methodological shifts. Rather than serving solely as a source of knowledge, the teacher is increasingly seen as a facilitator of learning who guides students in developing their interpretive skills. This requires not only subject expertise but also pedagogical competence and adaptability. Professional development and continuous reflection on teaching practices are therefore essential for educators seeking to improve their methodology (Brookfield, 2017; Richards, 2022). Despite the growing body of research on innovative teaching methods, there remains a gap between theory and practice in many higher education settings. Institutional constraints, large class sizes, and limited resources can hinder the implementation of interactive and student-centered approaches. Consequently, there is a need for practical, adaptable strategies that can be effectively applied in diverse educational contexts.

This study aims to address these challenges by exploring and proposing improved methodologies for teaching short stories in higher education literature classes. It seeks to identify effective pedagogical approaches that enhance student engagement, critical thinking, and interpretive skills while remaining feasible within existing institutional frameworks. By integrating insights from recent research and educational theory, this paper contributes to the ongoing discourse on literature pedagogy and offers practical recommendations for educators. Improving the methodology of teaching short stories is not merely a matter of adopting new techniques but involves a comprehensive rethinking of instructional goals, student roles, and assessment practices. As higher education continues to evolve, literature instructors must embrace innovative, inclusive, and student-centered approaches to ensure that the study of short fiction remains relevant, engaging, and intellectually enriching for modern learners.

Literature review. The methodology of teaching short stories in higher education has attracted increasing scholarly attention in recent years, particularly within the broader field of literature pedagogy and language education. As educational paradigms shift toward student-centered and competency-based learning, researchers have explored innovative strategies to enhance engagement, comprehension, and critical analysis in literature classrooms. This section reviews recent and relevant studies that inform the improvement of short story teaching methodologies, focusing on pedagogical approaches, the role of technology, assessment practices, and cultural responsiveness. A significant body of literature emphasizes the transition from traditional, teacher-centered instruction to student-centered learning environments. Earlier approaches to teaching literature often relied heavily on lectures, close reading guided exclusively by the instructor, and predetermined interpretations of texts. However, contemporary research argues that such methods limit students' active participation and critical thinking skills



(Beach, Appleman, Hynds, & Wilhelm, 2018). Instead, student-centered approaches, grounded in constructivist theory, encourage learners to actively engage with texts and construct meaning through interaction and collaboration. According to recent studies by Nguyen and Tran (2022), collaborative learning activities such as group discussions, peer teaching, and literature circles significantly improve students' interpretive abilities and motivation. In addition to collaborative learning, inquiry-based and problem-based learning approaches have gained prominence in literature instruction. These approaches position students as investigators who explore themes, characters, and narrative techniques through guided questioning and research. For instance, Savvidou (2020) highlights that inquiry-based tasks enable students to develop higher-order thinking skills, including analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, which are essential for literary interpretation. Similarly, problem-based learning scenarios, where students address complex questions related to the text, have been shown to enhance engagement and deepen understanding (Hmelo-Silver, 2019).

The integration of digital technologies has also transformed the teaching of short stories in higher education. With the increasing availability of digital tools and online platforms, educators can create more interactive and multimodal learning experiences. Kern (2018) and Robin (2021) emphasize the role of digital storytelling, multimedia annotations, and online discussion forums in promoting active engagement with literary texts. These tools allow students to explore narratives through various modes, including visual, auditory, and interactive elements, thereby accommodating diverse learning styles. Moreover, recent studies (Gupta, 2023; Li & Hafner, 2021) indicate that the use of digital platforms fosters collaborative learning beyond the classroom and encourages continuous interaction with texts. Another important dimension in the literature is the role of assessment in shaping learning outcomes. Traditional assessment methods in literature classes, such as written exams and essays, often focus on content recall and predetermined interpretations. However, contemporary research advocates for more formative and authentic assessment strategies that promote critical thinking and creativity. Bloxham and Boyd (2019) argue that formative assessment, including reflective journals, peer feedback, and portfolio-based evaluation, provides continuous insights into students' learning processes and encourages self-regulation. In the context of short story teaching, creative assignments such as rewriting narratives, developing alternative endings, and performing dramatizations have been shown to enhance students' engagement and interpretive skills (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001; Richards, 2022).

Cultural relevance and inclusivity have also emerged as central themes in recent literature. As classrooms become increasingly diverse, educators are encouraged to incorporate texts that reflect a wide range of cultural perspectives. Damrosch (2020) emphasizes the importance of world literature in fostering global awareness and intercultural competence among students. Similarly, recent studies by Alimov (2021) and Gupta (2023) highlight that students are more engaged when they encounter texts that resonate with their own cultural experiences. In this regard, the selection of short stories from diverse authors and contexts can enhance students' ability to connect personally with the material and develop a broader understanding of literary traditions. Reader-response theory continues to play a significant role in shaping modern literature pedagogy. According to this theoretical framework, meaning is not inherent in the text alone but is constructed through the interaction between the reader and the text (Rosenblatt, 1978). Recent research builds on this perspective by emphasizing the importance of personal interpretation and emotional engagement in literature learning. For example, Langer (2019) argues that encouraging students to share their individual responses to texts fosters a deeper understanding and appreciation of literature. This approach aligns with contemporary pedagogical practices that prioritize student voice and agency in the learning process. Another key area of research focuses on the development of critical literacy skills through literature instruction. Critical literacy involves the ability to analyze texts in relation to power, ideology,



and social context. Scholars such as Luke (2018) and Janks (2020) argue that literature classes provide an ideal platform for developing these skills, as literary texts often reflect complex social and cultural issues. In the context of short stories, analyzing themes such as identity, inequality, and conflict can help students develop critical awareness and engage with broader societal questions.

Despite these advancements, several challenges remain in implementing innovative methodologies in higher education. Large class sizes, limited instructional time, and institutional constraints can hinder the adoption of student-centered approaches. Furthermore, some educators may lack the training or resources needed to effectively integrate digital tools and alternative assessment methods (Richards, 2022). As a result, there is a need for practical and scalable strategies that can be adapted to different educational contexts. The literature indicates a clear shift toward more interactive, inclusive, and technology-enhanced approaches to teaching short stories in higher education. Student-centered learning, digital integration, formative assessment, and cultural responsiveness are identified as key components of effective pedagogy. However, further research is needed to bridge the gap between theoretical frameworks and classroom practice, particularly in diverse and resource-constrained settings. This study builds on these insights by proposing improved methodologies that are both pedagogically sound and practically feasible, contributing to the ongoing development of literature teaching in higher education.

Research discussion. The findings of this study highlight the importance of adopting innovative and student-centered methodologies in teaching short stories within higher education literature classes. The discussion integrates the insights gained from the literature review with practical pedagogical implications, emphasizing how improved instructional strategies can enhance students' engagement, comprehension, and critical thinking skills. One of the most significant outcomes of this research is the demonstrated effectiveness of interactive and collaborative learning approaches. Traditional lecture-based methods, while still prevalent in many institutions, tend to position students as passive recipients of knowledge. In contrast, the implementation of group discussions, peer analysis, and literature circles creates a more dynamic learning environment where students actively participate in meaning-making processes. These findings align with Nguyen and Tran (2022), who argue that collaborative learning fosters deeper engagement and improves interpretive skills. In practice, when students are encouraged to share diverse perspectives on a short story, they develop not only analytical abilities but also communication and interpersonal skills. Another key aspect revealed in this study is the role of inquiry-based and problem-based learning in enhancing higher-order thinking. By framing literary analysis as a process of exploration rather than mere interpretation, instructors can guide students to ask critical questions about themes, characters, and narrative structures. This approach helps students move beyond surface-level understanding and engage in deeper analysis. For example, tasks that require students to examine the social or psychological dimensions of a story encourage them to connect textual elements with broader contexts. Such practices support the development of analytical and evaluative skills, which are essential outcomes of higher education.

The integration of digital technologies also emerges as a crucial factor in improving teaching methodology. The use of multimedia tools, online discussion platforms, and digital storytelling techniques allows instructors to create more engaging and inclusive learning experiences. Students who may struggle with traditional text-based analysis often benefit from multimodal approaches that combine visual, auditory, and interactive elements. Furthermore, digital tools facilitate continuous engagement with literary texts beyond the classroom, enabling asynchronous discussions and collaborative projects. However, the effectiveness of technology integration depends on the instructor's ability to align digital tools with pedagogical objectives rather than using them as mere add-ons. Assessment practices play an equally important role in shaping students' learning experiences. The study confirms that traditional summative



assessments, such as written exams, may not fully capture students' analytical and creative abilities. Instead, formative and alternative assessment methods—such as reflective journals, creative writing tasks, and project-based assignments—provide a more comprehensive evaluation of students' skills. These methods encourage students to take ownership of their learning and engage more deeply with the material. For instance, asking students to rewrite a short story from a different perspective or to create a digital adaptation allows them to demonstrate both understanding and creativity.

Cultural relevance and inclusivity are also critical considerations in the teaching of short stories. The findings suggest that students are more motivated and engaged when they encounter texts that reflect diverse cultural perspectives and resonate with their own experiences. Incorporating short stories from various cultural backgrounds not only broadens students' literary knowledge but also promotes empathy and intercultural competence. In multicultural classrooms, this approach can foster a more inclusive learning environment where all students feel represented and valued. Despite these positive outcomes, the study also identifies several challenges in implementing improved methodologies. Institutional constraints, such as large class sizes and limited resources, can make it difficult to adopt interactive and technology-based approaches. Additionally, some instructors may lack the training or confidence required to implement innovative teaching strategies effectively. Addressing these challenges requires institutional support, including professional development programs and access to technological resources. Overall, the discussion underscores that improving the methodology of teaching short stories is a multifaceted process that involves rethinking instructional practices, assessment methods, and the role of both teachers and students. By adopting a holistic and flexible approach, educators can create more engaging and effective literature learning experiences in higher education.

Conclusion. This study demonstrates that the effectiveness of teaching short stories in higher education can be significantly enhanced through the adoption of student-centered, interactive, and technology-supported methodologies. Moving away from traditional lecture-based approaches toward collaborative, inquiry-based, and culturally responsive practices allows students to engage more deeply with literary texts and develop essential critical thinking skills. Furthermore, the use of formative and creative assessment methods provides a more comprehensive evaluation of students' learning outcomes. The findings also highlight the importance of aligning pedagogical strategies with the diverse needs and backgrounds of students, ensuring inclusivity and relevance in literature education. While challenges such as institutional limitations and lack of resources persist, these can be addressed through targeted support and professional development for educators. Ultimately, improving the methodology of teaching short stories is not only about enhancing literary understanding but also about fostering analytical, creative, and intercultural competencies that are essential in today's globalized world. Future research should continue to explore practical and scalable approaches to implementing these methodologies across different educational contexts.

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